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Internationalising practices and representations of the ‘other’ in second-level elite schools in Ireland

While Irish elite schools have adopted some internationalising practices, international students are often erased from their ‘public faces’. Based on interviews and analysis of schools’ websites, this paper argues that Brooks and Waters’ (2014) argument that elite schools hide their internationalism to preserve an explicit national identity for strategic purposes largely applies to the Irish case. In addition, it explores how features characteristic of Irish elite educational settings can help understand ambiguous attitudes to the international ‘other’, who is not only hidden but also at times ‘Irish-ised’ as these schools cultivate a cultural identity defined primarily along ethno-national lines.

Keywords: Elite education; Ireland; internationalisation; international recruitment; cultural capital; elite identities

1. Introduction

The internationalisation of the third-level sector has become a core policy focus in Ireland, where higher education institutions strive to draw international students and to position themselves as key players on the global education market (DES 2010; 2013). Ireland’s internationalising policy extends beyond European frameworks and is increasingly geared towards the U.S., the Irish diaspora and high-growth economies. It is supported by a discourse intertwining the internationalisation of education with the imperatives of economic globalisation (Courtois 2014; Lynch, Grummel, and Devine 2012, 13). In this context, Irish third-level institutions endeavour to present themselves as ‘international’ or ‘global’ and to create environments amenable to international students and visiting scholars. As suggested elsewhere (Altbach 2007; De Vita and Case 2003; Moutsios 2010; Rhoads and Torres 2006; Wilkins 2012), internationalisation has become an imperative and a powerful legitimating and marketing tool.

The Irish second-level sector offers a different picture: only one school teaches the International Baccalaureate syllabus, five schools boast an international accreditation and a small minority of institutions explicitly present themselves as internationally-oriented and/or as having a significant intake of international students. These schools are among the 53 fee-paying schools, which dominate the Irish educational landscape¹ but they are not the most prestigious. Overall fee-paying schools remain largely focused on their local and national markets and while there is evidence that they recruit international students, these practices remain discreet and in many cases invisible.

Weenink (2009) argues that the main parameters of internationalisation in higher education do not necessarily apply to the secondary sector: second-level schools are expected to play a role in nation-building by fostering national consciousness and as such are more likely to be oriented to the local and/or national rather than to the international; they generally do not have enough autonomy to take decisions about funding or curricular orientation (see also Matthews 2002). On the other hand, Yemini (2012) states that deregulation and cutbacks have encouraged or forced second-level schools to be more autonomous and that pressure from stakeholders (such as board members or parents with an international orientation) as well as the necessity for

¹ In Ireland many second-level schools were founded by religious orders and congregations and remain private. In 1967 the State took on the cost of secondary education in participating private schools, while others preferred to receive lower amounts of state subsidies and to continue charging fees in order to maintain their social exclusivity. Therefore the term ‘fee-paying’ is used here instead of ‘private’ to avoid confusion, since many private schools can in fact be attended for free.

schools to prepare their pupils for an increasingly internationalised third-level sector have a significant impact at secondary level. Weenink's observations apply to the Irish case to some extent: Ireland became independent in 1922 and schools played an important role in fostering a national consciousness centred on Catholic values (Coolahan 1981, Inglis 1998). However, as noted by Mooney Simmie (2012), second-level education policy has become increasingly neoliberal in nature, in particular since the economic collapse of 2007—a time which coincided with drastic cutbacks to the education sector. While they are partly funded by the State, and as such are accountable to the Department of Education and Skills (DES), fee-paying schools are in private ownership and have always relied on private sources of funding to function. They are also very active in defending their model of self-governance and autonomy, in particular in the area of admission procedures. Although Ireland's internationalising policy originally excluded the second-level sector (DES 2004), the presence of international students in these schools signals that there are no explicit institutional barriers to internationalisation at second level.

Consequently and also given Ireland's high level of economic globalisation and global ambitions, it may seem surprising at first that Irish schools have not yet embraced the internationalising strategies visible in other countries equally keen to be key players on the global market such as Singapore (Koh and Kenway 2012), South Korea (Song 2013) or Hong Kong (Waters and Leung 2013) among others.

The questions of if and how elite schools are responding to globalisation have recently moved centre-stage in elite education research (e.g. Brooks and Waters 2014; Kenway and McCarthy 2014; Koh and Kenway 2012). As the field of power changes, so do elites' strategies of distinction (Bourdieu, Boltanski, and Saint-Martin 1973; Wagner 2012). In various parts of the world, elite schools' international orientation allows them to draw additional prestige on local education markets (Aguilar and Nogueira 2012; Kenway and Fahey 2014; Wagner 1998; Weenik 2009). The development of the International Baccalaureate, the growing appeal of the 'world school' concept and the 'global branding' strategies used by some international schools are indicative of the increased value of internationalism in elite education at secondary level (Doherty et al. 2012; Hill 2012; McKenzie 2012; Cambridge 2002).

Yet as recent research suggests, the appeal of internationalism is not universal: in the U.K., while second-level schools engage in recruiting international students, it is largely hidden from their 'public faces' as promoting a typical 'English education' draws more benefits, appealing to both local and international clienteles (Brooks and Waters 2014). Thus, Brooks and Waters argue that visible international activities are limited to those which are commercially valuable and perceived as non-threatening to their English identity. It can be noted also that the presence of international students does not necessarily mean that integration and meaningful interaction are taking place (Darchy-Koechlin and Draelants 2010) nor does it mean that local students develop a cosmopolitan orientation beyond a sense of being at ease in the world (Matthews and Dishu 2005; Maxwell and Aggleton 2014; Tamatea, Hardy, and Ninnies 2008).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether these observations apply to the Irish case and help understand the lack of internationalisation (or at least the lack of visible internationalisation) in the Irish fee-paying secondary sector. Internationalisation can be understood in various ways, which include internationalising the curriculum, creating school partnerships, organising trips abroad, employing international staff, etc. The main focus here is on the (in)visibility of international recruitment practices. Yet it is necessary both to scrutinise and to go beyond the schools' public faces in order to understand the processes at play. The next section details the methodology employed; section 3 groups fee-paying schools according to the level of internationalisation they display; based on other research findings, section 4 explores the reasons why internationalisation is problematic and needs to be hidden while section 5 reflects on the centrality of ethnic and cultural identities in elite education and how these compete with internationalism.

2. Methodology

This paper is based principally on documentary research and fieldwork conducted between 2008 and 2012. Over this period I carried out in-depth interviews with staff and former pupils of elite and other fee-paying schools. These were supplemented with periods of ethnographic observation and documentary research focused in particular on school policy documents and promotional material, which were analysed systematically along a series of themes, which include social diversity, ethnic diversity and internationalisation.

For the purpose of this paper, the websites of all 53 fee-paying schools were re-examined, paying particular attention to the theme of internationalisation and more specifically the recruitment of international students and how it was presented. A systematic analysis of their websites was carried out in order to identify how the schools presented themselves publicly. In other words, their 'public face' was scrutinised in a process similar to that used by Brooks and Waters (2014). Schools increasingly engage in marketing themselves and managing their online 'public face' is important (Brooks and Waters 2014, Wilkin 2012). Furthermore, in a context where schools are highly individualised and where their respective religious denomination and 'ethos' are central to their discourses around identity and pedagogy (Courtois 2015), and where parents are encouraged to behave as consumers in their decisions around school choice (Buchanan and Fox 2008; Lynch and Moran 2006), school websites display a broad and varied array of 'strategies of persuasion' (McDonald, Pini, and Mayes 2012), which encapsulate more meaning than a simple marketing exercise. Yemini and Cohen (2014) have also developed website analysis as a tool to evaluate the internationalisation of schools.

While Brooks and Waters (2014) and Yemini and Cohen (2014) encompassed all aspects of 'internationalism' from recruitment to travel, the primary focus here is on the recruitment of international students. These are here primarily understood as students whose residence is overseas and who travel to Ireland specifically to study. However it is acknowledged that this category is somehow fluid as websites and spokespersons may not distinguish clearly between non-nationals living in Ireland and non-nationals living overseas. International recruitment can also take various forms from direct enrolment for one year or more to stays of a few weeks organised through agencies in response to demand from non-English-speaking families for English language immersion. While some non-fee-paying schools compete with fee-paying schools in the league tables, they were not included here as it quickly emerged that the small number of reputed non-fee-paying schools did not actively recruit international students, nor did they present an international profile².

In their promotional material, schools often describe themselves in a short text of two or three paragraphs, which identifies the main features of the school: location, religious denomination, gender of pupils and core mission or ethos. This short statement is typically found on the front page of prospectuses and on the homepage of their websites. Where the opening statement is very short, it is complemented by further descriptions under headings such as 'school mission', 'statement' or 'Headmaster's welcome', which are meant to encapsulate the ethos of the school. A first phase consisted in identifying occurrences of references to international recruitment practices in these 'front statements'. In a second phase, the rest of the available material was explored in order to identify references to internationalisation which

² Unlike fee-paying schools, non-fee-paying schools receive a fixed sum of money per eligible (resident) student from the State. They are not supposed to charge fees to compensate this loss of income; neither are they expected to internationalise their recruitment as they are supposed to prioritise their local communities (DES 2004; DES 1993). Some international agencies offer places in non-fee-paying schools but it is understood that only a small number of places are available. For both fee-paying and non-fee-paying schools, the number of teachers allocated by the State also depends on the number of eligible students registered.

while not featuring prominently, were not completely hidden and would still be available to the public and presumably to prospective clients willing to investigate the school documentation beyond the website homepage. The material thus collected was subsequently analysed in detail in order to identify how international recruitment was framed.

As Brooks and Waters note in their study, the reality of life in these schools may be very different from the schools' 'public face', in particular with respect to international recruitment. The data collected in the course of interviews complemented the analysis of promotional material, although interviews were not carried out in all 53 schools and due to this as well as the hidden nature of internationalisation, some uncertainty remains as to actual schools' practices.

The names of the schools have been changed to ensure that participants could not be identified.

A note on fee-paying and elite schooling in Ireland

The second-level fee-paying sector consists of 53 schools (out of over 700 second-level schools in the country), which are partially funded by the State and also charge fees directly to parents. Their admission policies prioritise past pupils' siblings and children. In most schools, kinship ties guarantee automatic admission. Furthermore, religious discrimination in school admission practices is also legitimate as schools can legally prioritise applicants of a certain faith and in some cases a baptismal certificate is required in order to apply.

The vast majority of schools in Ireland are denominational and predominantly Catholic. A number of Protestant schools cater for the 3% of the Irish population who identify as Protestant. For historical reasons, these are still over-represented in the fee-paying sector: Out of 53 fee-paying schools, 33 identify as Catholic, 16 as Protestant and four as multi-denominational (although they were originally denominational, two Protestant and one Jewish)³.

Together fee-paying schools cater for less than 7% of the school-going population. Each of them is highly individualised, presenting a specific ethos, specific values and focusing on a specific clientele, identifiable in terms of geographic location (in the case of day schools) and in terms of families' professional backgrounds and religious denomination. As in other national contexts (see Cookson and Persell 1985), the fee-paying sector is far from homogeneous. It includes highly exclusive institutions as well as cheaper schools with a broader recruitment base. Discussing elite education requires separating out elite institutions from the broader fee-paying sector—while keeping in mind that firstly, even within this smaller group of schools, strategies of distinction may take different shapes and forms and secondly, that the distinction between elite and non-elite schools within the fee-paying sector is understood as fluid.

In Ireland, 12 schools in particular present features characteristic of elite schools⁴. Five of these recruit their students nationally while seven are geared towards a local market and/or particular segments of the elites. Compared to the broader fee-paying sector, this sub-group comprises a higher proportion of all-boys boarding-schools and fewer non-Catholic schools.

3. Schools' 'public faces' and internationalisation

The 53 fee-paying schools examined can be divided into four groups according to the level of visibility of international recruitment in their documentation: those that present their intake of international students as central to their identity (group 1, three schools), those that without going this far do acknowledge the presence of international students and openly invite them to

³ The remaining school is affiliated to 'the School of Philosophy'.

⁴ Typologies such as the one developed by Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) are helpful to separate out elite schools from other fee-paying schools. In the Irish context, elite schools are defined as those schools which are at the intersection of three groups: schools with high fees, schools with high rates of admission to selective college courses, and schools with numerous alumni in the *Irish Who's Who*.

apply (group 2, eight schools), those that acknowledge their presence in more discreet ways (group 3, 12 schools) and those which make international students invisible or near-invisible (group 4, 30 schools).

3.1. Group 1: ‘International schools’

Aside from private for-profit independent English languages schools, the only designated ‘international school’ in Ireland is an independent primary school which caters for Irish children and children of non-nationals in Ireland. While it closely resembles the model of an elite international school as described for instance by Wagner (1998) and promotes an internationally minded outlook, it has failed to develop a secondary department and therefore remains a small institution on the margin of the private education sector. No other school in Ireland was explicitly founded as an international school.

Only one secondary school has a name which evokes an international dimension. Known locally as a Saint Enda’s German School, it recently added ‘Eurocampus’ to its name. Two more schools, Saint John’s and Fairview Park, broadly identify as international schools. While their names do not immediately denote an international character, internationalism features prominently in their ‘front statements’. Both Fairview Park and Saint John’s display their membership of the Council of International Schools and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, which no other Irish school is affiliated to (three more schools, including Colby College, are affiliated to the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference, an association gathering schools built on the English Public School model). Saint John’s is also the only secondary school in Ireland, which offers the International Baccalaureate programme. The proportion of international students in these schools is uncertain. Fairview Park boasts an intake of 21% international students, while the website of Saint Enda’s shows a diagram indicating that 44% of its pupils are not Irish; however, these statistics are based on nationality as opposed to residence. Of the three schools, Fairview Park is the one, which recruits overseas students in the most explicit manner (brochures in various languages can be downloaded from the site); it is also the most expensive of all Irish schools.

3.2. Group 2: Open-door policy?

Eight schools do not identify immediately as international schools but nonetheless invite applications from abroad. With one exception, these schools are recent, lesser-known fee-paying schools; they are predominantly girls’ or mixed schools.

These schools have an ‘international students’ section on their website, which promotes the school to overseas students. It appears that some schools in this group have committed significant resources to attracting international students: one school in particular has a dedicated coordinator who acts as a point of contact for international students throughout their stay. In two of these schools, it is a separate programme, focused on English-language acquisition, which is offered to international students—who will attend some, but not all classes with Irish students, and only for part of a term. This indicates that the second-level sector is well poised to engage in this particular type of commercial activity focused on language acquisition, well developed in the private sector and at third level, where fee-paying international students follow a separate tailored syllabus and co-habit with their Irish peers without being integrated as full-time students.

The way the international presence is framed as part of these schools’ statements varies. Some schools mention it in a matter-of-fact way, simply stating that they ‘welcome students from all over Ireland and beyond’, while others list the countries their international students are from but the proportion of international students is not specified and international students are not otherwise visible. Only half of these schools mention international students in their ‘front

statements'. They often do so by referring to a 'cosmopolitan flavour' or a an 'international atmosphere' in the school.

3.3. Group 3: A discreet presence

The next 12 schools make no reference to internationalisation in their 'front statements' but evidence of internationalism can be found beyond these. There is no specific section addressed to international applicants, which makes the recruitment process invisible.

Two schools (the most prestigious Catholic boarding schools) only make reference to international students in a video presentation, in both cases recently added to their websites. Another school, Colby College, which presents itself as a Protestant school inspired from the English Public School model, boasts an intake of 40% non-Irish students. This makes it one of the most internationalised, if not the most internationalised school in Ireland; however, this information is not mentioned on its homepage but emerges after fine-combing the rest of the website.

On the websites of these schools, the international presence is associated with openness and tradition (in one case it is framed as being in continuity with the school's tradition of 'monastic outreach and hospitality') but the vocabulary of cosmopolitanism and internationalism is not used—as if international students were invited to integrate and settle in without generating any transformation.

3.4. Group 4: The invisible international other

In three cases, it is only in the fee structure that the reality of international recruitment emerges. One website includes a separate overseas application form to download and another indicates a (hefty) supplement for overseas applicants while nothing else on the website suggests these schools welcome international applications. In one particular instance, while international students or any other theme related to internationalism are glaringly absent from the school's extensive website, its homepage content is available in Spanish, Korean and German.

The other 27 schools make no reference to international students, internationalism or any related theme throughout their website and documentation (with the exception of school trips). Instead of celebrating or acknowledging internationalism (or other forms of diversity), the 'front statements' of these schools insist on the importance of their denominational ethos, making it clear that they give priority to students baptised in that faith and already connected to the school. In interviews, the Principals of some of these schools acknowledged there was an international presence in their schools; but it remains completely hidden in the schools' 'public faces'.

4. An uneasy relationship with internationalism?

Out of the 12 elite schools identified in previous work, only two fall into the first two groups (schools presenting themselves as international or as open to international students). Ten fall in the third and fourth groups (discreet presence or invisibility of international students). The data presented above shows that internationalisation is not used as a marketing feature for the vast majority of fee-paying schools in Ireland, apart from those which have chosen it as a niche, and which often operate on a secondary market as opposed to belonging to the smaller group of elite schools—which echoes Saint Martin and Gemelli's work on the internationalisation of second-rate management schools in France in the 1990s (Saint-Martin and Gemelli 1998), before internationalisation became an imperative feature of third-level elite schools (Wagner 2012). A number of schools seem to be in the process of internationalising their recruitment but have not adapted their 'public faces' accordingly and/or do not openly celebrate internationalism. There are several possible reasons why internationalism is largely hidden by the majority of these schools.

4.1. Internationalisation as a shameful commercial activity

First and foremost, as Brooks and Waters argued in their study of English private schools (2014), internationalisation is to a large extent a commercial activity, bolstered by overseas demand for English language immersion (see also Rivzi and Lingard 2010). It often stems from financial necessity rather than from a genuine desire to create international, cosmopolitan schools.

In one case, the supplement charged to overseas students varies from €4,000 to €7,350 depending on the region of origin and whether or not the student applies directly or through an agency. Three schools, which operate as day schools, enrol international students and place them with local families for a fee of €17-19,000 per year (three to four times what local day students would pay). Such figures, while anecdotal, suggest that international students represent potentially considerable financial resources for the schools.

When asked how they recruited their international students, school Principals mentioned word of mouth and denied being involved in any marketing activities abroad. One Principal argued her school was merely responding to demand from Spanish and German families increasingly disillusioned with their State education systems: it provided a refuge from a failing public sector rather than actively diverting pupils from it. However, a number of overseas agencies specialised in placing students in schools in English-speaking countries, including Ireland, advertise their services online. They may carry out a substantial amount of the necessary marketing on behalf of Irish schools but unfortunately the nature of their agreements with Irish schools is unknown.

In the course of interviews, several principals made a distinction between international students on 'programmes' and other, more 'legitimate', non-Irish students:

You mean on specific programmes or people who've moved in—we would have some diplomatic children now here so you know they've moved back to the country, maybe they've been out for a couple of years and they're back, we have a few at the moment we have maybe five or six American students, but I mean their families are here now, so it's not anything like programmes, no no (Principal, day school; group 4—international students invisible).

The Principal of another day school admitted that he had enrolled international students in the past, who came 'primarily for the purpose of learning English', which was problematic. In one case, it was 'a disaster' and the school ended up having 'to feed him every day' as presumably the host family did not honour their contract with the intermediary agency. He thus suggested that while the demand existed, catering for international students was not really 'worth the trouble'. Both Principals thus dissociated themselves from 'programmes' and commercial international agencies.

A number of private colleges aimed at international students have recently closed down in the light of revelations of visa fraud and were publicly exposed as money-making schemes offering poor educational quality. Principals' efforts to dissociate themselves from such purely commercial and often unethical activities might help understand why it is important for them to frame internationalisation in a way that obfuscates its lucrative aspect. In contrast to their English counterparts described by Brooks and Waters, controversially Irish elite schools are subsidised by the State, which may justify a certain cautiousness and discretion around commercial activities—also at odds with the moral and frugal education the most prestigious of these schools purport to provide.

4.2. Internationalism as disruption of the school's ethos

Two of the three openly 'international schools' (group 1) describe themselves as 'multi-denominational' while the third describes itself first as having a 'distinctly international atmosphere' and further on in the statement as a Presbyterian school, signifying the centrality of internationalism to its identity, over and above its religious denomination. Several of the schools displaying an 'open-door policy' (group 2) also present themselves as multi-denominational and in one case non-denominational. By contrast, of all 30 schools, which make the international invisible (group 4), 18 present their identities as strongly denominational, offering an education pervaded with Christian (often Catholic) values, where all subjects are taught through a Christian lens and their admission guidelines place a clear emphasis on religious denomination, sometimes to the point of being openly exclusionary.

As already mentioned, it is legal for schools to prioritise children of past pupils as well as applicants of a given faith, at the expense of others. As a result 'newcomer children' are not evenly distributed across schools as these admission criteria make it difficult for many to gain entry in over-subscribed schools (Byrne et al. 2010; Lynch, Grummel, and Devine 2012; Smyth et al. 2009). As Kichling (2013) argues, religious practice does not in itself direct school choice: through the pervasive 'ideology of choice' parents are encouraged to combine consumption and religious practice; religion is sometimes used to sanitise school choice when it is in fact dictated by a concern for social and ethnic exclusiveness. Religious segregation thus intersects with social and ethnic segregation and this is amplified where schools charge fees unaffordable to the less privileged groups in society (and to the vast majority of the population in the case of the most expensive elite schools).

Obviously, newcomer children as a group would differ significantly from international students both in terms of residency status and in terms of financial means, cultural capital, ability and willingness to exercise choice as consumers of education, etc. The socio-economic position of non-nationals cuts across ethno-national or religious divisions, resulting in different statuses—from migrant worker to internationally mobile professional, the latter being more acceptable than the former (Wagner 1998). However, while schools displaying a strong religious ethos may enrol privileged non-Irish nationals able to afford their fees, they have a more pronounced tendency to make them invisible and to present a 'public face' which is not welcoming of diversity, religious, ethnic, national or else.

Where Principals admitted they had a significant international intake, their attitude to this diversity of a kind was sometimes ambiguous. In particular, several attempted to erase this aspect of their schools by pointing out that their 'international' intake consisted mostly of children of Irish descent, in other words that these were practically Irish:

I was talking about the international dimension, now, I'd just like to say to you that again, people would sometimes feel that 'oh, there are a lot of foreigners at that school', and that's I think relevant there because a lot of these boys and girls are the sons and daughters of Irish people, who now live all around the world, and they may have been born in China or Hong Kong, or Kenya, or Germany, and yet will have Irish parents,

choosing to send them back to Ireland and a boarding school offers them what they want. So a lot of our children have an Irish identity, an Irish heritage, but they have no sense of Irish culture, so maybe that's why their parents are sending them back here. And again, I see this as a strength. The college is not insular, I don't like insularity, I don't like inward-looking. We are a very welcoming community, we are tolerant of other cultures, we are working with other cultures and therefore, once again, this international mix gives us something very special I think and should not be denigrated – which sometimes people would say, which I think is unfair (Colby College, Protestant elite school; 40% international students; discreet mention on website).

In this particular account, although the Principal acknowledges the international presence in his school, international students are stripped of what makes them 'foreign' and assimilated to the broader student body through their alleged common Irish heritage and identity and their supposed willingness to acquire 'a sense of Irish culture' (as opposed to a more instrumental aspiration such as English language acquisition). The Principal does not challenge the apparent racism in the comments which he reports. Instead, he neutralises these comments by 'Irish-ising' the international students in his school, thus hiding the ethnic 'other'.

Several authors have examined the connection between a strong sense of ethno-national identity and negative attitudes to the ethnic other in Ireland. Loyal (2003) for instance speaks of the persistence of 'exclusionary nationalism', while Feldman (2006) argues that 'race-making' is still central to the construction of Irish identities despite the increased ethnic diversity visible in the country. This is further complicated in the education sector by the fact that educational policy often fails to question the nationalist narrative of Ireland as a white, monocultural nation (Bryan 2010). There are currently plans at government level to 'activate' the Irish diaspora by fast-tracking visa applications for tourists and third-level students of Irish descent (DES 2013) while immigration policy has become stricter over the years—in particular with the 2004 referendum which removed the right to citizenship of children born in Ireland to non-Irish parents. In this context the national dominates the international as the diaspora is defined as primarily Irish. Their supposed commonality of culture makes them legitimate consumers of Irish culture and education (by contrast, the students of the English language schools which closed down are constructed as economic migrants, whose access should be strictly regulated [DES 2014]).

This 'Irish-isation' was articulated to another principle of legitimation in the course of interviews:

I'd say currently we may have ... I'd have to check the figures but I'd say, 20, 20 plus. But that varies between boys who are sons of Irish people who happen to be living in England or France or Germany, but most students would have connections, some prior connections ... we have one boy from Africa but his father was Irish, and we would have a good few sons of Ambassadors and people working in development organisations and the EU and some people like that (Principal, elite boarding school, discreet presence of international students on website).

International students are again 'Irish-ised' and distinguished from language students (and other migrants) by this emphasis on their parents' high-status, international professions. As Wagner (1998) explains, internationally mobile elites are perceived as more acceptable than their less privileged fellow nationals. Here both features (high socio-economic status and ethno-national origin) are mobilised to minimise the gap separating international students from their Irish peers and to legitimate their presence. By this process, the hidden non-Irish students are re-ordered along both ethnic and socio-economic lines.

This insistence on a certain social and cultural homogeneity, cemented in these accounts by cultural (and implicitly, ethnic) connections between Ireland and its diaspora, is indicative of practices common to most fee-paying schools. The constitution of a homogeneous year group is central to their admission policies and practices. These schools endeavour to forge a community

spirit and to encourage student bonding—bonds which are prolonged into adult life through the work of past pupils’ unions and clubs (Courtois 2012). Past pupils interviewed from schools, with a significant international intake, remember they had classmates who were not Irish but these were perceived as transient, ‘visiting students’ and were somehow marginalised (recipients of scholarships were similarly marginalised). The transient presence of international students, as well as their lack of proficiency in English (often commented on negatively by Principals) might make them somehow problematic in this particular framework and disrupt the ethos of strong bonds and lifelong friendships; although it could equally be argued that such students might contribute to the construction of international social networks—an argument which is, by contrast, widely used by third-level institutions.

4.3. Marketing and instrumentalising internationalism

For these schools in the fee-paying sector, which are open or relatively open about their recruitment of international students, the language used sometimes amalgamates international students with other non-traditional students (e.g. newcomers, children of different religious faiths, children with special educational needs, etc.) as part of statements on the schools’ openness to diversity. This particular approach negates individual differences by bundling them together. This is the case of the top two Catholic boarding schools, which have recently added a comment to that effect on their respective websites, which is consistent with a discourse (and emerging practices) aimed at mitigating their exclusiveness.

Overall, Catholic schools are more likely than Protestant schools to make their international recruitment invisible. The three ‘international schools’ were originally Protestant. Both types of schools were originally rooted in a cosmopolitan tradition with linkages to other European countries; but Catholic teaching later played a central role in the nationalist project (Inglis 1998). When the Principal of Colby, quoted above, insists his school is not ‘insular’, he is implying that it differs in this sense from many Catholic schools. Colby College was originally modeled on Eton and identifies with the English Public School model. From the 1960s, it became one of several elite Protestant schools, which broadened their recruitment and adopted a more relaxed approach to religious practice, thus appealing to non-practising Catholics and (Considère-Charon 1998). This trade-off was rendered necessary by the decline of the Protestant population, which meant Irish Protestant schools experienced financial difficulties and had to broaden their recruitment or face closure (Fennelly 2010)⁵. Internationalism thus brought necessary streams of income and could be marketed as a distinguishing feature appealing to a local clientele less drawn to the cultural homogeneity promoted by the elite Catholic model.

Yet the discourse on diversity and openness does not match the reality as these schools practice fees unaffordable to the majority of the population and most fee-paying schools do not run scholarship schemes and when they do, these are rarely designed in a way which effectively increases the social or ethnic diversity in the school. In this sense, it is a rather non-threatening diversity, which is introduced, echoing Brooks and Waters’ (2014) as well as Reay et al.’s observations (2007), according to whom middle-class British parents sometimes view the ethnic ‘other’ (carefully selected and in small numbers) as a valuable source of intercultural and social capital. It is perhaps worth noting also that the adjectives ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘international’ are preferred to ‘multicultural’ or ‘intercultural’, more politicised as they question the monocultural narrative and point to the necessity to ‘make space’ for other cultures. The expressions ‘cosmopolitan atmosphere’ or ‘flavour’ are often used, suggesting a transient, superficial and unthreatening presence.

⁵ They were also more affected by the recent budget cuts, which took away some of the subsidies that were specific to non-Catholic schools within the sector. Since 2011, five fee-paying schools have joined the non-fee-paying sector; three of these are Protestant schools.

One school, instead of hiding internationalisation, endeavours to ‘sell’ it to its clientele by displaying its merits and benefits for Irish clients:

This facilitates outward mobility so that students can spend a period abroad in a similar environment should they so wish. Roebuck’s local students also have the opportunity to develop an international outlook by drawing on the experiences of our international students. International students are encouraged to make their own unique contribution to lessons and modules and in doing so help to internationalise the curriculum and assist all in acquiring global competences (school website, girls’ school, international students visible).

In this particular case, international students are instrumentalised and presented as beneficial to the mainstream clientele for the added value they bring in terms of international social and cultural capital. While this echoes the way some principals construct internationalism as evidence of tolerance and openness to diversity in discourses which contribute to the moral legitimacy their schools strive to uphold, this active promotion of international diversity and associated added cultural capital is unique to this particular school—which is not an elite school but a small, recent fee-paying school.

5. How valuable is internationalism for Irish elite schools?

Only one of the three schools, which publicly present an international orientation, is part of the group of 12 schools identified as elite schools. Out of the remaining 11 elite schools, five make internationalisation invisible. Although in other jurisdictions, elite schools have embraced internationalism, in Ireland elite schools are not more visibly internationalised than other fee-paying schools. However all 12 schools present other ‘international’ features: their students take part in international events and competitions and the schools organise school trips abroad. These school trips generally fall into two categories: on the one hand cultural or leisure tourism, mainly in Europe, as is typical of international socialisation practices in privileged families (Wagner 2007) and on the other hand charity work in developing countries, in line with the missionary work carried out historically by the religious orders associated with these schools.

Neither type of trip offers optimal conditions for the development of a cosmopolitan mindset or cross-cultural communication skills—charity work being particularly problematic in this respect (Fahey and Kenway 2015). International competitions and events allow students to communicate with children of other nationalities on a more equal (if competitive) basis; however these would be very similar socially. As argued by Maxwell and Aggleton (2014), Brooks and Waters (2014) or Allan and Charles (2013), these international practices do not threaten the white, middle-class identity constructed by these schools and in fact either instrumentalise or silence the ‘other’. As is the case in the UK also, these practices affirm rather than challenge students’ sense of privilege and power. This was encapsulated by a school Principal describing her students’ participation in an international forum, where they had the opportunity to publicly challenge international decision-makers—which gave them the sense that ‘they can change the world’. In other words, such events help students construct a global imagination which is in fact based on their own sense of privilege and power.

While the focus of this paper is international recruitment, it is perhaps worth noting that all Principals interviewed indicated their schools hosted children of internationally mobile executives and diplomats. This suggests that no Irish school has established itself as the preferred choice for internationally mobile families or conversely that transnational elites have failed to negotiate their own educational space in Ireland, being instead diluted across a number of institutions.

One additional possible explanation for the relatively low priority given to internationalism could be the fact that Irish ethno-national identity and Irish culture have become

valuable currencies not only within but also beyond national borders. Inglis argues that the Irish are viewed as one of the most successful and popular ethnic groups in the world, a success due to 'the increased value of embodying an Irish habitus—an Irish way of being in the world and presenting oneself—and accumulating Irish cultural capital in the form of music, literature, art and so forth' (Inglis 2008, 92-93). A particular construct of the 'Irish habitus' (friendly, debonair, down to earth) is deployed on occasions on the international business scene (Courtois 2014). Independently from the historical nationalist project, and whether or not an 'Irish habitus' exists in the Bourdieusian sense as a distinctive range of embodied dispositions, positive stereotypes associated with Ireland and the Irish are increasingly instrumentalised and promoted by agencies selling Irish educational, cultural and commercial products to international clienteles. Preserving an Irish identity, insulated from international influences, makes strategic sense on both the local and international elite education market as it aligns with the ethno-national divide in the national field of power and provides a viable alternative to the 'international cultural capital' valued in international elite circles.

6. Conclusion

International students are made entirely invisible on the websites of a majority of fee-paying schools. On others, their presence is mentioned but rarely celebrated while the international recruitment process remains largely hidden from the schools' 'public faces'. Schools, which display an international identity, tend to operate on a secondary market. Internationalism is not an explicit, dominant practice in Irish elite schools or in the rest of the fee-paying sector.

The prestigious schools, which acknowledge and tacitly encourage internationalism, do so in a way that camouflages or negates its commercial aspect and also that does not threaten their identities. The conclusions drawn by Brooks and Waters (2014) apply to the Irish case to a large extent and in particular the fact that the international 'other' is hidden in order to preserve and promote the English (or in this case Irish, or Jesuit, Opus Dei, etc.) character of the educational setting. While more traditional forms of internationalism do not threaten the schools' identities, international recruitment and religious or linguistic diversity pose a threat to the social, cultural (and arguably, ethnic) homogeneity much valued by the schools' traditional clienteles. In Irish schools the international 'other' is treated in a way not dissimilar to the ethnic and/or social other: sometimes—but rarely—celebrated; often hidden, silenced or negated, and where possible, 'Irish-ised', which is another way of negating difference.

Irish elite schools and their clienteles value social closure and are focused on the national more than on the international. The social and cultural homogeneity cultivated by these schools also has a strong ethno-national dimension: national forms of social and moral capital are valued more highly and play a more prominent role in the construction of elite identity in these schools than the 'cosmopolitan capital' valued in other national contexts. International recruitment is a recent addition rather than a founding feature; it further complicates the existing tension between the schools' displayed 'Irishness' (referring to Irish cultural capital and ethnicity) and 'Englishness' (hidden or explicit connections to the English educational system, English language) without challenging either in any significant manner. A local rearticulation of privilege along transnational lines (McCarthy and Kenway 2012) has yet to become visible in second-level Irish elite schools.

Mobility patterns show that unlike the U.K. and U.S., Ireland does not occupy a dominant position in the global education market. This would partly explain why internationalising practices such as 'global branding' (Cambridge 2002) or establishing sister schools abroad are beyond their reach. But it is also a Western, English-speaking country, and while the globalising efforts of the third-level sector have not been officially extended to the

second-level sector, demand from abroad might increase in the future. The third-level sector has been changing rapidly and the second-level sector might eventually follow suit; in particular if it has to undergo the same funding crisis as the one which radically changed the face of the third-level sector. Whether internationalisation will translate into reciprocal exchange practices, curricular adjustments, increased visibility and celebration of cosmopolitanism is uncertain.

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